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United for Quality Care

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West Haven, CT

Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Karlene Whonder and I am a Personal Care Attendant (PCA). I currently live in West Haven, CT and I care for consumers in Ansonia and New Haven. I am here today to ask you for funding so that PCAs like me can have a livable wage and quality benefits.

I have been working as a PCA for 15 years and find fulfillment in this work. It makes me happy to see my consumers living comfortable lives, and to know I have helped them overcome their disabilities to pursue the luxuries others are able to enjoy. To give someone the opportunity to pursue their independence is a truly uplifting feeling.

At the same time I am deeply saddened by the fact that PCAs continue to be disrespected in this State. Last year we reached an agreement with the state on our contract, and we are still waiting for it to be implemented. We were supposed to be receiving stipends to help us afford health insurance, but we've been waiting almost a year and still haven't received anything. The same goes for the paid sick days we won in our contract. So not only do we have to go without healthcare insurance, but when we are sick we must go unpaid as well.

These benefits were promised to PCAs in the contract we won last year. Many legislators, some of you in this room, stood shoulder to shoulder with us as we fought for these advances, because you understood that PCAs are professional caregivers and deserve livable wages and quality benefits, and we celebrated together when the contract was finally signed. Well now the state has broken their promises not only to PCAs across Connecticut, but to you all as well. PCAs and the consumers they care for deserve more than broken promises.

PCAs have been exploited and undervalued for too long, and it is time that it ends. We are a workforce consisting primarily of women of color, and despite the fact that we provide life affirming care to our consumers many of us live in poverty. Last year we came together with this Legislature and the state and forged a contract

that will uplift this workforce if implemented. Please do the right thing and allocate the funding needed to give PCAs the wages and benefits we deserve. We deserve an end to poverty for caregivers.

Thank you for your time.